

READING OF LIFE

WITH OTHER POEMS

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A READING OF LIFE

THE HUELESS LOVE

UNTO that love must we through fire attain,
Which those two held as breath of common air;
The hands of whom were given in bond elsewhere ;
Whom Honour was untroubled to restrain.

Midway the road of our life's term they met,
And one another knew without surprise ;
Nor cared that beauty stood in mutual eyes ;
Nor at their tardy meeting nursed regret.

THE HUELESS LOVE

To them it was revealed how they had found
The kindred nature and the needed mind ;
The mate by long conspiracy designed ;
The flower to plant in sanctuary ground.

Avowed in vigilant solicitude
For either, what most lived within each breast
They let be seen : yet every human test
Demanding righteousness approved them good.

She leaned on a strong arm, and little feared
Abandonment to help if heaved or sank
Her heart at intervals while Love looked blank,
Life rosier were she but less revered.

An arm that never shook did not obscure
Her woman's intuition of the bliss—
Their tempter's moment o'er the black abyss,
Across the narrow plank—he could abjure.

A READING OF LIFE

Then came a day that clipped for him the thread,
And their first touch of lips, as he lay cold,
Was all of earthly in their love untold,
Beyond all earthly known to them who wed.

So has there come the gust at South-west flung
By sudden volt on eves of freezing mist,
When sister snowflake sister snowdrop kissed,
And one passed out, and one the bell-head hung.

A READING OF LIFE

SONG IN THE SONGLESS

THEY have no song, the sedges dry,

And still they sing.

It is within my breast they sing,

As I pass by.

Within my breast they touch a string,

They wake a sigh.

There is but sound of sedges dry ;

In me they sing.

A READING OF LIFE .

UNION IN DISSEVERANCE

SUNSET worn to its last vermilion he ;
She that star overhead in slow descent :
That white star with the front of angel she ;
He undone in his rays of glory spent

Halo, fair as the bow-shot at his rise,
He casts round her, and knows his hour of rest
Incomplete, were the light for which he dies,
Less like joy of the dove that wings to nest.

Lustrous momentarily, near on earth she sinks ;
Life's full throb over breathless and abased :
Yet stand they, though impalpable the links,
One, more one than the bridally embraced.

A READING OF LIFE

THE BURDEN OF STRENGTH

IF that thou hast the gift of strength, then know
Thy part is to uplift the trodden low;
Else in a giant's grasp until the end
A hopeless wrestler shall thy soul contend.

A READING OF LIFE

THE MAIN REGRET

WRITTEN FOR THE CHARING CROSS ALBUM

I

SEEN, too clear and historic within us, our sins of
omission

Frown when the Autumn days strike us all
ruthlessly bare.

They of our mortal diseases find never healing
physician ;

Errors they of the soul, past the one hope to
repair.

II

Sunshine might we have been unto seed under
soil, or have scattered

Seed to ascendant suns brighter than any that
shone.

THE MAIN REGRET

Even the limp-legged beggar a sick desperado
has flattered

Back to a half-sloughed life cheered by the
mere human tone.

A READING OF LIFE

ALTERNATION

BETWEEN the fountain and the rill
I passed, and saw the mighty will
To leap at sky; the careless run,
As earth would lead her little son.

Beneath them throbs an urgent well,
That here is play, and there is war.
I know not which had most to tell
Of whence we spring and what we are.

A READING OF LIFE

HAWARDEN

WHEN comes the lighted day for men to read
Life's meaning, with the work before their hands
Till this good gift of breath from debt is freed,
Earth will not hear her children's wailful bands
Deplore the chieftain fall'n in sob and dirge;
Nor they look where is darkness, but on high.
The sun that dropped down our horizon's verge,
Illumes his labours through the travelled sky,
Now seen in sum, most glorious; and 'tis known
By what our warrior wrought we hold him fast.
A splendid image built of man has flown;
His deeds inspired of God outstep a Past.
Ours the great privilege to have had one
Among us who celestial tasks has done.

A READING OF LIFE

AT THE CLOSE

To Thee, dear God of Mercy, both appeal,
Who straightway sound the call to arms. Thou
 . know'st;
And that black spot in each embattled host,
Spring of the blood-stream, later wilt reveal.
Now is it red artillery and white steel;
Till on a day will ring the victor's boast,
That 'tis Thy chosen towers uppermost,
Where Thy rejected grovels under heel.
So in all times of man's descent insane
To brute, did strength and craft combining strike,
Even as a God of Armies, his fell blow.
But at the close he entered Thy domain,
Dear God of Mercy, and if lion-like
He tore the fall'n, the Eternal was his Foe.

A READING OF LIFE

FOREST HISTORY

BENEATH the vans of doom did men pass in.

Heroic who came out ; for round them hung

A wavering phantom's red volcano tongue,

With league-long lizard tail and fishy fin :

II

Old Earth's original Dragon ; there retired

To his last fastness ; overthrown by few.

Him a laborious thrust of roadway slew

Then man to play devorant straight was fired.

A READING OF LIFE

III

More intimate became the forest fear

While pillared darkness hatched malicious life

At either elbow, wolf or gnome or knife

And wary slid the glance from ear to ear.

IV

In chillness, like a clouded lantern-ray,

The forest's heart of fog on mossed morass,

On purple pool and silky cotton-grass,

Revealed where lured the swallower byway.

V

Dead outlook, flattened back with hard rebound

Off walls of distance, left each mounted height.

It seemed a giant hag-fiend, churning spite

Of humble human being, held the ground.

FOREST HISTORY

VI

Through friendless wastes, through treacherous
woodland, slow
The feet sustained by track of feet pursued
Pained steps, and found the common brotherhood
By sign of Heaven indifferent, Nature foe.

VII

Anon a mason's work amazed the sight,
And long-frocked men, called Brothers, there
abode.
They pointed up, bowed head, and dug and sowed;
Whereof was shelter, loaf, and warm firelight.

VIII

What words they taught were nails to scratch
the head.
Benignant works explained the chanting brood.
Their monastery lit black solitude,
As one might think a star that heavenward led.

A READING OF LIFE

IX

Uprose a fairer nest for weary feet,
Like some gold flower nightly inward curled,
Where gentle maidens fled a roaring world,
Or played with it, and had their white retreat.

X

Into big books of metal clasps they pored.
They governed, even as men; they welcomed
lays.
The treasures women are whose aim is praise,
Was shown in them: the Garden half restored.

XI

A deluge billow scoured the land off seas,
With widened jaws, and slaughter was its foam.
For food, for clothing, ambush, refuge, home,
The lesser savage offered bogs and trees.

FOREST HISTORY

XII

Whence reverence round grey-haired story grew;
And inmost spots of ancient horror shone
As temples under beams of trials bygone;
For in them sang brave times with God in view.

XIII

Till now trim homesteads bordered spaces green,
Like night's first little stars through clearing
showers.
Was rumoured how a castle's falcon towers
The wilderness commanded with fierce mien.

XIV

Therein a serious Baron stuck his lance;
For minstrel songs a beauteous Dame would
pout.
Gay knights and sombre, felon or devout,
Pricked onward, bound for their unsung romance.

A READING OF LIFE

XV

It might be that two errant lords across
The block of each came edged, and at sharp
cry
They charged forthwith, the better man to try.
One rode his way, one couched on quiet moss.

XVI

Perchance a lady sweet, whose lord lay slain,
The robbers into gruesome durance drew.
Swift should her hero come, like lightning's
blue !
She prayed for him, as crackling drought for rain.

XVII

As we, that ere the worst her hero haps,
Of Angels guided, nigh that loathly den :
A toady cave beside an ague fen,
Where long forlorn the lone dog whines and yaps.

FOREST HISTORY

XVIII

By daylight now the forest fear could read
Itself, and at new wonders chuckling went.
Straight for the roebuck's neck the bowman
spent
A dart that laughed at distance and at speed.

XIX

Right loud the bugle's hallali elate
Rang forth of merry dingles round the tors;
And deftest hand was he from foreign wars,
But soon he hailed the home-bred yeoman mate.

XX

Before the blackbird pecked the turf they woke;
At dawn the deer's wet nostrils blew their last.
To forest, haunt of runs and prime repast,
With paying blows, the yokel strained his yoke.

A READING OF LIFE

XXI

The city urchin mooned on forest air,
On grassy sweeps and flying arrows, thick
As swallows o'er smooth streams, and sighed
him sick
For thinking that his dearer home was there.

XXII

Familiar, still unseized, the forest sprang
An old-world echo, like no mortal thing.
The hunter's horn might wind a jocund ring,
But held in ear it had a chilly clang.

XXIII

Some shadow lurked aloof of ancient time ;
Some warning haunted any sound prolonged,
As though the leagues of woodland held them
wronged
To hear an axe and see a township climb.

FOREST HISTORY

XXIV

The forest's erewhile emperor at eve
Had voice when lowered heavens drummed for
gales.

At midnight a small people danced the dales,
So thin that they might dwindle through a sieve.

XXV

Ringed mushrooms told of them, and in their
throats,
Old wives that gathered herbs and knew too
much.

The pensioned forester beside his crutch,
Struck showers from embers at those bodeful notes.

XXVI

Came then the one, all ear, all eye, all heart;
Devourer, and insensibly devoured;
In whom the city over forest flowered,
The forest wreathed the city's drama-mart.

A READING OF LIFE

XXVII

There found he in new form that Dragon old,
From tangled solitudes expelled; and taught
How blindly each its antidote besought;
For either's breath the needs of either told.

XXVIII

Now deep in woods, with song no sermon's drone,
He showed what charm the human concourse
works:
Amid the press of men, what virtue lurks
Where bubble sacred wells of wildness lone.

XXIX

Our conquest these: if haply we retain
The reverence that ne'er will overrun
Due boundaries of realms from Nature won,
Nor let the poet's awe in rapture wane.

A READING OF LIFE

A GARDEN IDYL

WITH sagest craft Arachne worked
Her web, and at a corner lurked,
Awaiting what should plump her soon,
To case it in the death-cocoon.
Sagaciously her home she chose
For visits that would never close ;
Inside my chalet-porch her feast
Plucked all the winds but chill North-east.

The finished structure, bar on bar,
Had snatched from light to form a star,
And struck on sight, when quick with dews,
Like music of the very Muse.

A READING OF LIFE

Great artists pass our single sense ;
We hear in seeing, strung to tense ;
Then haply marvel, groan mayhap,
To think such beauty means a trap.
But Nature's genius, even man's
At best, is practical in plans ;
Subservient to the needy thought,
However rare the weapon wrought.
As long as Nature holds it good
To urge her creatures' quest for food
Will beauty stamp the just intent
Of weapons upon service bent.
For beauty is a flower of roots
Embedded lower than our boots ;
Out of the primal strata springs,
And shows for crown of useful things

Arachne's dream of prey to size
Aspired ; so she could nigh despise

A GARDEN IDYL

The puny specks the breezes round
Supplied, and let them shake unwound ;
Assured of her fat fly to come ;
Perhaps a blue, the spider's plum ;
Who takes the fatal odds in fight,
And gives repast an appetite,
By plunging, whizzing, till his wings
Are webbed, and in the lists he swings,
A shrouded lump, for her to see
Her banquet in her victory.

This matron of the unnumbered threads,
One day of dandelions' heads
Distributing their gray perruques
Up every gust, I watched with looks
Discreet beside the chalet-door ;
And gracefully a light wind bore,
Direct upon my webster's wall,
A monster in the form of ball ;

A READING OF LIFE

The mildest captive ever snared,
That neither struggled nor despaired,
On half the net invading hung,
And plain as in her mother tongue,
While low the weaver cursed her lures,
Remarked, "You have me ; I am yours."

Thrice magnified, in phantom shape,
Her dream of size she saw, agape.
Midway the vast round-raying beard
A desiccated midge appeared ;
Whose body pricked the name of meal,
Whose hair had growth in earth's unreal ;
Provocative of dread and wrath,
Contempt and horror, in one froth,
Inextricable, insensible,
His poison presence there would dwell,
Declaring him her dream fulfilled,
A catch to compliment the skilled ;

A GARDEN IDYL

And she reduced to beaky skin,
Disgraceful among kith and kin

Against her corner, humped and aged,
Arachne wrinkled, past enraged,
Beyond disgust or hope in guile.

Ridiculously volatile

He seemed to her last spark of mind ;

And that in pallid ash declined

Beneath the blow by knowledge dealt,

Wherein throughout her frame she felt

That he, the light wind's libertine,

Without a scoff, without a grin,

And mannered like the courtly few,

Who merely danced when light winds blew,

Impervious to beak and claws,

Tradition's ruinous Whitebeard was ;

Of whom, as actors in old scenes,

Had grannam weavers warned their weans,

A READING OF LIFE

With word, that less than feather-weight,
He smote the web like bolt of Fate.

This muted drama, hour by hour,
I watched amid a world in flower,
Ere yet Autumnal threads had laid
Their gray-blue o'er the grass's blade,
And still along the garden-run
The blindworm stretched him, drunk of
sun.

Arachne crouched unmoved; perchance
Her visitor performed a dance;
She puckered thinner; he the same
As when on that light wind he came.

Next day was told what deeds of night
Were done; the web had vanished quite;

A GARDEN IDYL

With it the strange opposing pair ;
And listless waved on vacant air,
For her adieu to heart's content,
A solitary filament.

A READING OF LIFE

FORESIGHT AND PATIENCE

SPRUNG of the father blood, the mother brain,
Are they who point our pathway and sustain.
They rarely meet; one soars, one walks retired.
When they do meet, it is our earth inspired.

To see Life's formless offspring and subdue
Desire of times unripe, we have these two,
Whose union is right reason: join they hands,
The world shall know itself and where it stands;
What cowering angel and what upright beast
Make man, behold, nor count the low the least,
Nor less the stars have round it than its flowers.
When these two meet, a point of time is ours.

FORESIGHT AND PATIENCE

As in a land of waterfalls, that flow
Smooth for the leap on their great voice below,
Some eddies near the brink borne swift along,
Will capture hearing with the liquid song,
So, while the headlong world's imperious force
Resounded under, heard I these discourse.

First words, where down my woodland walk she led,
To her blind sister Patience, Foresight said :

—Your faith in me appals, to shake my own,
When still I find you in this mire alone.

—The few steps taken at a funeral pace
By men had slain me but for those you trace.

—Look I once back, a broken pinion I :
Black as the rebel angels rained from sky !

A READING OF LIFE

—Needs must you drink of me while here you
live,
And make me rich in feeling I can give.

—A brave To-be is dawn upon my brow :
Yet must I read my sister for the How.
My daisy better knows her God of beams
Than doth an eagle that to mount him seems.
She hath the secret never fieriest reach
Of wing shall master till men hear her teach.

—Liker the clod flaked by the driving plough,
My semblance when I have you not as now.
The quiet creatures who escape mishap
Bear likeness to pure growths of the green sap :
A picture of the settled peace desired
By cowards shunning strife or strivers tired.
I listen at their breasts : is there no jar

FORESIGHT AND PATIENCE

Of wrestlings and of stranglings, dead they are,
And such a picture as the piercing mind
Ranks beneath vegetation. Not resigned
Are my true pupils while the world is brute.
What edict of the stronger keeps me mute,
Stronger impels the motion of my heart.
I am not Resignation's counterpart.
If that I teach, 'tis little the dry word,
Content, but how to savour hope deferred.
We come of earth, and rich of earth may be ;
Soon carrion if very earth are we !
The coursing veins, the constant breath, the
use
Of sleep, declare that strife allows short truce ;
Unless we clasp decay, accept defeat,
And pass despised ; "a-cold for lack of heat,"
Like other corpses, but without death's plea.

—My sister calls for battle ; is it she ?

A READING OF LIFE

—Rather a world of pressing men in arms,
Than stagnant, where the sensual piper charms
Each drowsy malady and coiling vice
With dreams of ease whereof the soul pays price !
No home is here for peace while evil breeds,
While error governs, none ; and must the seeds
You sow, you that for long have reaped disdain,
Lie barren at the doorway of the brain,
Let stout contention drive deep furrows, blood
Moisten, and make new channels of its flood !

.

—My sober little maid, when we meet first,
Drinks of me ever with an eager thirst.
So can I not of her till circumstance
Drugs cravings. Here we see how men advance
A doubtful foot, but circle if much stirred,
Like dead weeds on whipped waters. Shout the
word

FORESIGHT AND PATIENCE

Prompting their hungers, and they grandly march,
As to band-music under Victory's arch.
Thus was it, and thus is it; save that then
The beauty of frank animals had men.

—Observe them, and down rearward for a term,
Gaze to the primal twistings of the worm.
Thence look this way, across the fields that
show

Men's early form of speech for Yes and No.
My sister a bruised infant's utterance had;
And issuing stronger, to mankind 'twas mad.
I knew my home where I had choice to feel
The toad beneath a harrow or a heel.

—Speak of this Age.

—When you it shall discern
Bright as you are, to me the Age will turn.

A READING OF LIFE

—For neither of us has it any care;
Its learning is through Science to despair.

—Despair lies down and grovels, grapples not
With evil, casts the burden of its lot.
This Age climbs earth.

—To challenge heaven.

—Not less
The lower deeps. It laughs at Happiness!
That know I, though the echoes of it wail,
For one step upward on the crags you scale.
Brave is the Age wherein the word will rust,
Which means our soul asleep or body's lust,
Until from warmth of many breasts, that beat
A temperate common music, sunlike heat
The happiness not predatory sheds!

FORESIGHT AND PATIENCE

—But your fierce Yes and No of butting heads,
Now rages to outdo a horny Past.
Shades of a wild Destroyer on the vast
Are thrown by every novel light upraised.
The world's whole round smokes ominously,
 amazed
And trembling as its pregnant Ætna swells.
Combustibles on hot combustibles
Run piling, for one spark to roll in fire
The mountain-torrent of infernal ire
And leave the track of devils where men built.
Perceptive of a doom, the sinner's guilt
Confesses in a cry for help shrill loud,
If drops the chillness of a passing cloud,
To conscience, reason, human love; in vain:
None save they but the souls which them contain.
No extramural God, the God within
Alone gives aid to city charged with sin.

A READING OF LIFE

A world that for the spur of fool and knave,
Sweats in its laboratory, what shall save?
But men who ply their wits in such a school,
Must pray the mercy of the knave and fool.

—Much have I studied hard Necessity !
To know her Wisdom's mother, and that we
May deem the harshness of her later cries
In labour a sure goad to prick the wise,
If men among the warnings which convulse,
Can gravely dread without the craven's pulse.
Long ere the rising of this Age of ours,
The knave and fool were stamped as monstrous
Powers.

Of human lusts and lassitudes they spring,
And are as lasting as the parent thing.
Yet numbering locust hosts, bent they to drill,
They might o'ermatch and have mankind at
will.

FORESIGHT AND PATIENCE

Behold such army gathering : ours the spur,
No scattered foe to face, but Lucifer.
Not fool or knave is now the enemy
O'ershadowing men, 'tis Folly, Knavery !
A sea ; nor stays that sea the bastioned beach.
Now must the brother soul alive in each,
His traitorous individual devildom
Hold subject lest the grand destruction come.
Dimly men see it menacing apace
To overthrow, perchance uproot the race.
Within, without, they are a field of tares :
Fruitfuller for them when the contest squares,
And wherefore warrior service they must yield,
Shines visible as life on either field.
That is my comfort, following shock on shock,
Which sets faith quaking on their firmest rock.
Since with his weapons, all the arms of Night,
Frail men have challenged Lucifer to fight,
Have matched in hostile ranks, enrolled, erect,

A READING OF LIFE

The human and Satanic intellect,
Determined for their uses to control
What forces on the earth and under roll,
Their granite rock runs igneous; now they stand
Pledged to the heavens for safety of their land.
They cannot learn save grossly, gross that are:
Through fear they learn whose aid is good in war.

—My sister, as I read them in my glass,
Their field of tares they take for pasture grass.
How waken them that have not any bent
Save browsing—the concrete indifferent!
Friend Lucifer supplies them solid stuff:
They fear not for the race when full the trough.
They have much fear of giving up the ghost;
And these are of mankind the unnumbered host.

—If I could see with you, and did not faint
In beating wing, the future I would paint.

FORESIGHT AND PATIENCE

Those massed indifferents will learn to quake :
Now meanwhile is another mass awake,
Once denser than the grunTERS of the sty.
If I could see with you ! Could I but fly !

—The length of days that you with them have
 housed,
An outcast else, approves their cause espoused.

· O true, they have a cause, and woe for us,
While still they have a cause too piteous !
Yet, happy for us when, their cause defined,
They walk no longer with a stumbler blind,
And quicken in the virtue of their cause,
To think me a poor moulder of old saws !
I wait the issue of a battling Age ;
The toilers with your “troughsters” now engage ;
Instructing them through their acutest sense,
How close the dangers of indifference !

A READING OF LIFE

Already have my people shown their worth,
More love they light, which folds the love of
Earth.

That love to love of labour leads: thence love
Of humankind—earth's incense flung above.

—Admit some other features: Faithless, mean;
Encased in matter; vowed to Gods obscene;
Contemptuous of the impalpable, it swells
On Doubt; for pastime swallows miracles;
And if I bid it face what *I* observe,
Declares me hoodwinked by my optic nerve!

—Oft has your prophet, for reward of toil,
Seen nests of seeming cockatrices coil:
Disowned them as the unholyest of Time,
Which were his offspring, born of flame on slime.
Nor him, their sire, have known the filial fry:
As little as Time's earliest knew the sky.

FORESIGHT AND PATIENCE

Perchance among them shoots a lustrous flame
At intervals, in proof of whom they came.
To strengthen our foundations is the task
Of this tough Age; not in your beams to bask,
Though, lighted by your beams, down mining
caves

The rock it blasts, the hoarded foulness braves.
My sister sees no round beyond her mood;
To hawk this Age has dressed her head in hood.
Out of the course of ancient ruts and grooves,
It moves: O much for me to say it moves!
About his Æthiop Highlands Nile is Nile,
Though not the stream of the paternal smile:
And where his tide of nourishment he drives,
An Abyssinian wantonness revives.
Calm as his lotus-leaf to-day he swims;
He is the yellow crops, the rounded limbs,
The Past yet flowing, the fair time that fills;
Breath of all mouths and grist of many mills.

A READING OF LIFE

To-morrow, warning none with tempest-showers,
He is the vast Insensate who devours
His golden promise over leagues of seed,
Then sits in a smooth lake upon the deed.
The races which on barbarous force begin,
Inherit onward of their origin,
And cancelled blessings will the current length
Reveal till they know need of shaping strength.
'Tis not in men to recognize the need
Before they clash in hosts, in hosts they bleed.
Then may sharp suffering their nature grind ;
Of rabble passions grow the chieftain Mind.
Yet mark where still broad Nile boasts thousands
 fed,
For tens up the safe mountains at his head.
Few would be fed, not far his course pro-
 long,
Save for the troublous blood which makes him
 strong.

FORESIGHT AND PATIENCE

—That rings of truth! More do your people
thrive ;
Your Many are more merrily alive
Than erewhile when I gloried in the page
Of radiant singer and anointed sage.
Greece was my lamp : burnt out for lack of oil ;
Rome, Python Rome, prey of its robber spoil !
All structures built upon a narrow space
Must fall, from having not your hosts for base.
O thrice must one be you, to see them shift
Along their desert flats, here dash, there drift ;
With faith, that of privations and spilt blood,
Comes Reason armed to clear or bank the flood !
And thrice must one be you, to wait release
From duress in the swamp of their increase.
At which oppressive scene, beyond arrest,
A darkness not with stars of heaven dressed,
Philosophers behold ; desponding view.

A READING OF LIFE

Your Many nourished, starved my brilliant few ;
Then flinging heels, as charioteers the reins,
Dive down the fummy Ætna of their brains.
Belated vessels on a rising sea,
They seem : they pass !

—But not Philosophy !

—Ay, be we faithful to ourselves : despise
Nought but the coward in us ! That way lies
The wisdom making passage through our slough.
Am I not heard, my head to Earth shall bow ;
Like her, shall wait to see, and seeing wait.
Philosophy is Life's one match for Fate.
That photosphere of our high fountain One,
Our spirit's Lord and Reason's fostering sun,
Philosophy, shall light us in the shade,
Warm in the frost, make Good our aim and
aid.

FORESIGHT AND PATIENCE

Companioned by the sweetest, ay renewed,
Unconquerable, whose aim for aid is Good!
Advantage to the Many: that we name
God's voice; have there the surety in our aim.
This thought unto my sister do I owe,
And irony and satire off me throw.
They crack a childish whip, drive puny herds,
Where numbers crave their sustenance in words.
Now let the perils thicken: clearer seen,
Your Chieftain Mind mounts over them serene.
Who never yet of scattered lamps was born
To speed a world, a marching world to warn,
But sunward from the vivid Many springs,
Counts conquest but a step, and through disaster
sings.

**FRAGMENTS OF THE ILIAD
IN ENGLISH HEXAMETER VERSE**

A READING OF LIFE

FRAGMENTS OF THE ILIAD
IN ENGLISH HEXAMETER VERSE

ILIAD, B. I. V. 149

THE INVECTIVE OF ACHILLES

"HEIGH me! brazen of front, thou glutton for plunder,
how can one,
Servant here to thy mandates, heed thee among our
Achaians,
Either the mission hie on or stoutly do fight with the
foemen?
I, not hither I fared on account of the spear-armed
Trojans,
Pledged to the combat; they unto me have in nowise a
harm done;
Never have they, of a truth, come lifting my horses or
oxen;

A READING OF LIFE

Never in deep-soiled Phthia, the nurser of heroes, my
harvests

Ravaged, they; for between us is numbered full many a
darksome

Mountain, ay, therewith too the stretch of the windy sea-
waters.

O hugely shameless! thee did we follow to hearten thee,
justice

Pluck from the Dardans for him, Menelaos, thee too, thou
dog-eyed!

Whereof little thy thought is, nought whatever thou
reckest.

Worse, it is thou whose threat 'tis to ravish my prize
from me, portion

Won with much labour, the which my gift from the sons
of Achaia.

Never, in sooth, have I known my prize equal thine when
Achaians

Gave some flourishing populous Trojan town up to pillage.

Nay, sure, mine were the hands did most in the storm of
the combat,

FRAGMENTS OF THE ILIAD

Yet when came peradventure share of the booty amongst
us,

Bigger to thee went the prize, while I some small blessed
thing bore

Off to the ships, my share of reward for my toil in the
bloodshed !

So now go I to Phthia, for better by much it beseems
me

Homeward go with my beaked ships now, and I hold not
in prospect,

I being outraged, thou mayst gather here plunder and
wealth-store."

A READING OF LIFE

V. 225.

“Bibber besotted, with scowl of a cur, having heart of a deer, thou!

Never to join to thy warriors armed for the press of the conflict,

Never for ambush forth with the princeliest sons of Achaia
Dared thy soul, for to thee that thing would have looked
as a death-stroke.

Sooth, more easy it seems, down the lengthened array of
Achaians,

Snatch at the prize of the one whose voice has been lifted
against thee.

Ravening king of the folk, for that thou hast thy rule
over abjects;

Else, son of Atreus, now were this outrage on me thy last
one.

Nay, but I tell thee, and I do swear a big oath on it
likewise:

FRAGMENTS OF THE ILIAD

Yea, by the sceptre here, and it surely bears branches and
leaf-buds

Never again, since first it was lopped from its trunk on
the mountains,

No more sprouting; for round it all clean has the sharp
metal clipped off

Leaves and the bark; ay, verily now do the sons of Achaia,
Guardian hands of the counsels of Zeus, pronouncing the
judgement,

Hold it aloft; so now unto thee shall the oath have its
portent;

Loud will the cry for Achilles burst from the sons of
Achaia

Throughout the army, and thou chafe powerless, though
in an anguish,

How to give succour when vast crops down under man-
slaying Hector

Tumble expiring; and thou deep in thee shalt tear at thy
heart-strings,

Rage-wrung, thou, that in nought thou didst honour the
flower of Achaians."

A READING OF LIFE

ILIAD, B. II. V. 455

MARSHALLING OF THE ACHAIANS

LIKE as a terrible fire feeds fast on a forest enormous,
Up on a mountain height, and the blaze of it radiates
 round far,
So on the bright blest arms of the host in their march
 did the splendour
Gleam wide round through the circle of air right up to
 the sky-vault.
They, now, as when swarm thick in the air multitudinous
 winged flocks,
Be it of geese or of cranes or the long-necked troops of
 the wild-swans,
Off that Asian mead, by the flow of the waters of Kai-
 stros;
Hither and yon fly they, and rejoicing in pride of their
 pinions,

FRAGMENTS OF THE ILIAD

Clamour, shaped to their ranks, and the mead all about
them resoundeth;

So those numerous tribes from their ships and their shelter-
ings poured forth

On that plain of Scamander, and horrible rumbled beneath
them

Earth to the quick-paced feet of the men and the tramp
of the horse-hooves.

Stopped they then on the fair-flower'd field of Scamander,
their thousands

Many as leaves and the blossoms born of the flowerful
season.

Even as countless hot-pressed flies in their multitudes
traverse,

Clouds of them, under some herdsman's wonning, where
then are the milk-pails

Also, full of their milk, in the bountiful season of spring-
time;

Even so thickly the long-haired sons of Achaia the plain held,
Prompt for the dash at the Trojan host, with the passion
to crush them.

A READING OF LIFE

Those, likewise, as the goatherds, eyeing their vast flocks
of goats, know

Easily one from the other when all get mixed o'er the
pasture,

So did the chieftains rank them here there in their places
for onslaught,

Hard on the push of the fray; and among them King
Agamemnon,

He, for his eyes and his head, as when Zeus glows glad
in his thunder,

He with the girdle of Ares, he with the breast of Poseidon.

FRAGMENTS OF THE ILIAD

ILIAD, B. XI. V. 148

AGAMEMNON IN THE FIGHT

THESE, then, he left, and away where ranks were now
clashing the thickest,
Onward rushed, and with him rushed all of the bright-
greaved Achaians.
Foot then footmen slew, that were flying from direful
compulsion,
Horse at the horsemen (up from off under them mounted
the dust-cloud,
Up off the plain, raised up cloud-thick by the thundering
horse-hooves)
Hewed with the sword's sharp edge; and so meanwhile
Lord Agamemnon
Followed, chasing and slaughtering aye, on-urging the
Argives.

A READING OF LIFE

Now, as when fire voracious catches the unclipped woodland,
land,

This way bears it and that the great whirl of the wind,
and the scrubwood

Stretches uptorn, flung forward alength by the fire's fury
rageing,

So beneath Atreides Agamemnon heads of the scattered
Trojans fell; and in numbers amany the horses, neck-
stiffened,

Rattled their vacant cars down the roadway gaps of the
war-field,

Missing the blameless charicteers, but, for these, they
were outstretched

Flat upon earth, far dearer to vultures than to their home-
mates.

FRAGMENTS OF THE ILIAD

ILIAD, B. XI V. 378

PARIS AND DIOMEDES

So he, with a clear shout of laughter,
Forth of his ambush leapt, and he vaunted him, uttering
thiswise :
“Hit thou art ! not in vain flew the shaft ; how by rights
it had pierced thee
Into the undermost gut, therewith to have rived thee of
life-breath !
Following that had the Trojans plucked a new breath from
their direst,
They all frighted of thee, as the goats bleat in flight from
a lion.”
Then unto him untroubled made answer stout Diomedes :
“Bow-puller, jiber, thy bow for thy glorying, spyer at
virgins !

A READING OF LIFE

If that thou dared'st face me here out in the open with
weapons,

Nothing then would avail thee thy bow and thy thick
shot of arrows.

Now thou plumest thee vainly because of a graze of my
footsole ;

Reck I as were that stroke from a woman or some pettish
infant.

Aye flies blunted the dart of the man that's emasculate,
noughtworth !

Otherwise hits, forth flying from me, and but strikes it
the slightest,

My keen shaft, and it numbers a man of the dead fallen
straightway.

Torn, troth, then are the cheeks of the wife of that man
fallen slaughtered,

Orphans his babes, full surely he reddens the earth with
his blood-drops,

Rotting, round him the birds, more numerous they than
the women."

FRAGMENTS OF THE ILIAD

ILIAD, B. XIV. V. 283

HYPNOS ON IDA

THEY then to fountain-abundant Ida, mother of wild beasts,
Came, and they first left ocean to fare over mainland at
Lektos,

Where underneath of their feet waved loftiest growths of
the woodland.

There hung Hypnos fast, ere the vision of Zeus was ob-
servant,

Mounted upon a tall pine-tree, tallest of pines that on Ida
Lustily spring off soil for the shoot up aloft into aether.
There did he sit well-cloaked by the wide-branched pine
for concealment,

That loud bird, in his form like, that perched high up in
the mountains,

Chalkis is named by the Gods, but of mortals known as
Kymindis.

A READING OF LIFE

ILIAD, B. XIV. V. 394

CLASH IN ARMS OF THE ACHAIANS AND TROJANS

NOR the sea-wave so bellows abroad when it bursts upon
shingle,
Whipped from the sea's deeps up by the terrible blast of
the Northwind;
Nay, nor is ever the roar of the fierce fire's rush so
arousing,
Down along mountain-glades, when it surges to kindle a
woodland;
Nay, nor so tonant thunders the stress of the gale in the
oak-trees'
Foliage-tresses high, when it rages to raveing its utmost;
As rose then stupendous the Trojan's cry and Achaians',
Dread upshouting as one when together they clashed in
the conflict.

FRAGMENTS OF THE ILIAD

ILIAD, B. XVII. V. 426

THE HORSES OF ACHILLES

So now the horses of Aiakides, off wide of the war-ground,
Wept, since first they were ware of their charioteer
 overthrown there,

Cast down low in the whirl of the dust under man-slaying
 Hector.

Sooth, meanwhile, then did Automedon, brave son of Diores,
Oft, on the one hand, urge them with flicks of the swift
 whip, and oft, too,

Coax entreatingly, hurriedly; whiles did he angrily threaten.
Vainly, for these would not to the ships, to the Helle-
 spont spacious,

Backward turn, nor be whipped to the battle among the
 Achaians.

Nay, as a pillar remains immovable, fixed on the tomb-
 stone,

A READING OF LIFE

Haply, of some dead man or it may be a woman there-
under ;

Even like hard stood they there attached to the glorious
war-car,

Earthward bowed with their heads ; and of them so lament-
ing incessant

Ran the hot teardrops downward on to the earth from
their eyelids,

Mourning their charioteer ; all their lustrous manes dusty-
clotted,

Right side and left of the yoke-ring tossed, to the breadth
of the yoke-bow.

Now when the issue of Kronos beheld that sorrow,
his head shook

Pitying them for their grief, these words then he spake
in his bosom ;

“ Why, ye hapless, gave we to Peleus you, to a mortal
Master ; ye that are ageless both, ye both of you death-
less !

Was it that ye among men most wretched should come to
have heart-grief ?

FRAGMENTS OF THE ILIAD

'Tis most true, than the race of these men is there
wretcheder nowhere

Aught over earth's range found that is gifted with breath
and has movement."

A READING OF LIFE

THE MARES OF THE CAMARGUE

FROM THE *Mirèio* OF MISTRAL

A HUNDRED mares, all white! their manes
Like mace-reed of the marshy plains
Thick-tufted, wavy, free o' the shears :
And when the fiery squadron rears
Bursting at speed, each mane appears
Even as the white scarf of a fay
Floating upon their necks along the heavens away.

THE MARES OF THE CAMARGUE

O race of humankind, take shame!
For never yet a hand could tame,
Nor bitter spur that rips the flanks subdue
The mares of the Camargue. I have known,
By treason snared, some captives shown;
Expatriate from their native Rhone,
Led off, their saline pastures far from view:

And on a day, with prompt rebound,
They have flung their riders to the ground,
And at a single gallop, scouring free,
Wide-nostril'd to the wind, twice ten
Of long marsh-leagues devour'd, and then,
Back to the Vacarés again,
After ten years of slavery just to breathe salt sea

A READING OF LIFE

For of this savage race unbent,
The ocean is the element.
Of old escaped from Neptune's car, full sore,
Still with the white foam fleck'd are they,
And when the sea puffs black from grey,
And ships part cables, loudly neigh,
The stations of Camargue, all joyful in the roar;

And keen as a whip they lash and crack
Their tails that drag the dust, and back
Scratch up the earth, and feel, entering their flesh, wh
he,
The God, drives deep his trident teeth,
Who in one horror, above, beneath,
Bids storm and watery deluge seethe,
And shatters to their depths the abysses of the sea,

Cant. iv.

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